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MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. KISSINGER

FROM: JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE

SUBJECT: Communist Plans for the South Vietnamese Election

The Communists will employ a combination of political, military, and terror tactics to disrupt and exploit the South Vietnamese presidential election, according to the Saigon Station Chief's latest field appraisal (Tab A); however, he predicts that these tactics will have only limited success.

#### Political Tactics

According to this CIA appraisal, the Communists will place greatest emphasis on using both propaganda and physical coercion to dissuade people from voting. Little attempt will be made actively to encourage anti-Thieu voting.

Basically the Communists hope to exploit the divisive forces unleashed by the election issue. They also see this situation as an opportunity to join and exploit legal opposition to the GVN.

The Station Chief believes that inordinate Communist preoccupation with the possibility of a coup has resulted in a neglect of plans to exploit the election politically. As a result, few specific instructions seem to have been sent from Hanoi and COSVN to lower echelons leaving the latter somewhat on their own in pre-election planning. This has produced a certain incoherence in Communist tactical planning. In many areas, local cadre have been relatively inactive in combatting the election -- either in anticipation of a coup or because of failure to affect previous elections significantly.

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Military Tactics

Should a coup occur, Communist plans call for military attacks against the population centers. A second response would be to occupy rural areas left unprotected through the withdrawal of ARVN forces to cope with the coup in urban areas.

In any case, the enemy intends to initiate some sort of "high point" prior to the election. This will probably consist of scattered attacks by fire and sapper attacks up to and through election day. Terror and sabotage will probably also increase. A substantial step-up in activity has already occurred in the northwestern area of MR-3 and adjacent areas in Cambodia.

The Station Chief concludes that Communist military and political election tactics will have only limited success due to GVN preparedness and the enemy's military and political limitations.

We share the Station Chief's basic conclusions; however, he has probably overestimated enemy expectations of a coup. The Communists' assessment of actual coup opportunities is probably more realistic than he indicates in his appraisal. Recent Communist stress on coup planning probably is a combination of morale building propaganda and prudent contingency planning.

On the military side, current enemy attacks on ARVN forces at Krok are probably designed to discredit the GVN on the eve of the election through a Snoul-type defeat of the ARVN.

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